

Testimony of Austin Longendyke

Tuesday, March 8, 2016

Re: S.B. 221, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave

Senators Gomes and Hwang, Representatives Tercyak and Rutigliano, and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Austin Longendyke and I am a resident of Norwich, Connecticut. I am submitting this testimony to voice my support and one suggestion for S.B. 221, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave.

The proposed paid family and medical leave (“PFML”) legislation would create a more worker-friendly and attractive business environment in the state of Connecticut. I have heard it stated multiple times that Connecticut is losing businesses and young workers, who are attracted to larger urban areas like Boston or New York City. As a young person, I can state for a fact that if Connecticut were to implement a system of PFML for all employees, the state would be considerably more attractive to me as a location to permanently settle down.

In 2014, my mother was hospitalized for a couple of weeks with Sepsis. Thankfully, she recovered, but there were points throughout the ordeal where the doctors were unsure if she would survive. During this difficult time, those in my immediate family naturally spent as much time at the hospital with my mother as possible. This situation, though scary for my family, is not a unique one; serious illnesses and medical emergencies can affect anyone at any time.

Paid family and medical leave affords one the opportunity to take the time off to be there for a family member when a medical situation arises; with PFML, this can be done without the fear of losing one’s employment or losing one’s much-needed income. In addition, PFML provides the ability to take time off and still receive income when one is undergoing surgery, has just had a child, etc. With PFML, no one would need to choose between the health of oneself and/or one’s loved ones and being able to pay the bills.

I do have one suggestion for S.B. 221, and that would be to revise the language found in Section 14, Subsection A of the proposed legislation to include family members related *by affinity in addition to by blood*. Families in modern society are incredibly diverse, and it is essential that the legislation be as inclusive as possible so that all of Connecticut’s residents are able to benefit.

As a member of the LGBTQ community, this inclusivity is particularly important to me. I am fortunate to have a biological family that is accepting of my sexual orientation, yet not everyone who is non-heterosexual and/or gender non-conforming has this privilege. For those members of the LGBTQ community who are unable to find acceptance in their biological families, it is not unusual to create a surrogate family. These families are comprised of individuals who are not

related by blood, but nevertheless provide the same emotional and psychological support as any biological family does. In such a situation, a worker should be able to use their PFML when a member of their surrogate family has a medical emergency or illness; the employee would be paying into the same system as everyone else, and should therefore be entitled to use the benefits for situations involving their loved ones.

Paid family and medical leave is good for workers, which makes it good for business. The system is funded by the employees themselves, so there is no direct cost to the business owner. Having a system of PFML will makes employees more productive when they are on the job: it will allow workers to get medical attention when they need it, and will permit them to take time off when their loved ones are sick. This will help eliminate situations where employees are distracted on the job due to the medical concerns of either themselves or members of their families.

I respectfully ask all legislators to support S.B. 221, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave, and to consider the suggested revision of including *by affinity* to the definitions of family members found in the proposed legislation. A system of PFML would make me feel more confident about staying in Connecticut and raising a family here, as I would be able to care for the medical needs of my family and myself without having to sacrifice an income.

I am grateful for your consideration and the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

Austin Longendyke
Norwich, Connecticut